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ABSTRACT

South Carolina's first major dropout prevention initiative began two decades ago when leaders became more interested in the industrial development of the State. A 1966 study found that black youths were experiencing a dropout rate of 72%, while that of white youth was 48%. Statewide efforts taken in the early 1970's to alleviate this problem were fairly successful, but the dropout issue was subsequently almost forgotten until very recently. Today, the State suffers from one of the fourth lowest graduation rates in the nation, and black students' dropout rate remains unacceptably high. But dropout data are difficult to formulate and ascertain, and there is a shortage of information on the characteristics of the typical 1980's dropout since no detailed demographic profile has been published since 1973. Recently there has been a resurgence of interest in collecting data and formulating policies, including the establishment of a major statewide effort, the Department of Education's Dropout Prevention Task Force. Various strategies have been adopted for targeting specific groups of youth who may eventually drop out, including school-business alliances. Nonetheless, there remains the need for routine assessment of the circumstances of high risk students to determine if they are potential dropouts. Also, problems may increase in the wake of recent efforts to raise graduation standards. This report includes seven statistical tables and an appendix presenting a form for identifying high risk students. (KH)

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Dropout Trends Among Black Youth in South Carolina Public Schools

by

M. Hayes Mizell

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Once every ten to fifteen years the problem of school dropouts becomes a subject of widespread concern. We are again experiencing this phenomenon. The signs of renewed interest are all around us. Several years ago the National Education Association created the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, and made dropout prevention the major agenda item of the foundation. Last spring Teachers College at Columbia University devoted 135 pages of the spring issue of its journal, Teachers College Record, to the subject of dropouts. Increasingly, state governments are also turning attention to the dropout problem. In our own region, for example, North Carolina and Florida have funded major dropout prevention initiatives and have established state offices to provide leadership to these efforts. And recently there has been a National Dropout Prevention Center established at Clemson University.[1]

The current interest in dropouts is also apparent in South South Carolina. Last year, largely in response to growing national and state concern about at-risk youth and the dropout issue, the State Superintendent of Education appointed a twenty-eight member Dropout Prevention Task Force to study the dropout problem in South Carolina and to make recommendations to the State Board of Education. The task force was chaired by the state senator who is also the Chairman of the General Assembly's Select Committee on the Education Improvement Act, and it also included other legislators, and selected superintendents, principals, teachers, counselors, attendance workers, and parents. The task force is scheduled to make its report to the State Board of Education on April 8.[2]

What is different about the current national interest in dropouts is that business people have become strong advocates for doing something about the dropout problem. This is best seen in a 1985 report by the Business Advisory Commission of the Education Commission of the States. In a very direct statement the Commission spelled out why the dropout problem is now worrying so many people:

> The number of 14- to 24-year-olds who comprise America's entry-level labor pool is shrinking. Once almost a quarter of the U.S. population, this group will represent 16% of the population in 1995. At the same time, the number of young people who are disconnecting from school, work, and the benefits they confer is on the rise. The entry-level labor pool, then, contains more and more of the kinds of teenagers employers have been able to overlook in the past: poorly motivated, lacking fundamental literacy skills and unacquainted with the responsibilities and demands of the work world. These young people are at risk of never living up to their potential, never leading productive adult lives.[3]

It is no accident, of course, that this statement comes at a time when political and business leaders are also expressing so much concern about the productivity of the labor force, and about our nation's ability to remain competitive in international markets. Once again we are finding that economics is the key that unlocks action on a social issue.

Similar concerns gave rise to South Carolina's first major dropout prevention initiative two decades ago. There was a time, of course, when our state expressed little concern when certain children were not in school. If children were very poor, or Black, or had a handicapping condition little effort was made to encourage them to attend school, or to keep them in school.

South Carolina did not have a compulsory school attendance law of any type until 1919, but its application was limited to children between the ages of eight and fourteen who were required to attend school for only part of a school year. The law was enforced for just two years and consequently between 1921 and 1937 there was no effective compulsory school attendance. In 1937 a new attendance law was passed requiring parents to compel their children ages seven through sixteen to attend school unless the parents' "financial condition is such that the services of their children shall ncessarily be required to earn a living." However, this law provided no standards for enforcement.

By 1940 twenty-seven percent of Black fifteen year-old youth were not attending school at all, and 54% of Black youth ages 16 and 17 were not enrolled in school. In 1955 the South Carolina General Assembly repealed the compulsory school attendance law as a response to the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Topeka Board of Education. By 1960 the U.S. Census reported that 33,931 Black citizens twenty-five years and older had never been enrolled in school. But during the same year a researcher studying state school attendance policies "failed to locate any formal reports at state or local levels which provide for a complete accounting of all school-age youth not enrolled in school."[4]

Later in the 1960s, as South Carolina's leaders became more interested in the industrial development of the state, the consequences of the state's inattention to school attendance became clear. A 1966 report by the State Department of Education

indicated that while 40,422 Black pupils entered the first grade in 1953, only 11,179 graduated in 1965. That represented a dropout rate of 72 percent. With approximately the same number (41,858) of white children entering the first grade, the dropout rate twelve years later was 48 percent. While one out of every two white children graduated from high school, only one of every four Black children completed the twelfth grade. Most of the dropouts among Black youth occurred before the the ninth grade. This data apparently made an impression on South Carolina's policy makers because in 1967 the General Assembly re-enacted the compulsory school attendance law.[5]

A year later, in 1968, South Carolina's leaders commissioned Moody's Investors Service to conduct a major study of the state's economy. One of the report's findings focused on school dropouts:

> Every boy and girl who drops out of school represents a significant financial drain on the resources of South Carolina. Dropping out before graduation, the youth generally is unable to get a good job, make a good income, and pay a substantial tax. Instead, it is likely that he will for extended periods add to the state's welfare burden...Retaining youths in school becomes, then, both a safeguarding of past investment and a pledge of future income for the state.[6]

This finding, in combination with the impending conclusion of South Carolina's long resistance to school desegregation, paved the way for the state to address the dropout issue. In 1971 the State Board of Education adopted as one of its eleven major objectives "To reduce the number of dropouts by at least 50 percent by 1975." A detailed plan to achieve this objective was developed by the State Department of Education. Because the Department had found that "accurate data are not available as to

numbers, subpopulations, and characteristics of dropouts," the Department's plans included procedures for collecting more accurate data.[7]

A State Department of Education study of 1971-1972 dropouts produced the first and only detailed report on the characteristics of students withdrawing from school before graduation. Among the findings of the study were that Black males constituted the second largest group of dropouts. These youth differed from the average dropout in that they tended to withdraw from school during the ninth rather than the tenth grade, they had been retained one grade and were behind their peers in grade placement, and the communication between their homes and the schools had been "exceptionally poor." Black female dropouts were found to be representative of the average dropout in all respects except one: "Approximately 50 percent of these dropouts were married and/or pregnant prior to leaving school as were the white female dropouts."[8]

By 1975 it appeared the State Board of Education's five year goal of reducing the number of dropouts by 50 percent had been met. Whereas 14,025 students were recorded as dropouts in 1971-1972, by the end of the 1974-1975 school year there were 5,629 reported dropouts. However, it should be noted that the 8,396 fewer dropouts between 1971 and 1975 included a reduction of 6,983 that was achieved in the base year (1971) simply by using a new definition to calculate the number of dropouts. If one uses the 1971-1972 adjusted dropout figure of 7,042 the actual reduction in dropouts achieved by 1975 was 20 percent

rather than the objective of 50 percent.[9]

In the mid-1970s the dropout issue was largely forgotten as South Carolina focused its attention on the development, passage, and implementation of such landmark pieces of legislation as the Education Finance Act (1977), the Basic Skills Assessment Act (1978), and the Educator Improvement Act (1979). These dramatic initiatives culminated with the passage of the Education Improvement Act in 1984.[10]

During the period from the late 1970s to the present the number of dropouts reported each year for grades 1-12 reached a high of 13,700 in 1979-1980, and thereafter declined annually until 9,170 dropouts were reported in 1985-1986. During the 1985-1986 school year 2,000 fewer Black youth dropped out of school than six years before. During this period the percentage of Black students dropping out of school, when compared with the total enrollment of Black youth, also continued to decline. Currently the percentage of Black dropouts is the same as the percentage of white dropouts, 1.6 percent. It should also be noted that Black youth are not over represented in the total dropout population. Black students constitute 42 percent of the total school enrollment and they also constitute 42 percent of the total number of dropouts.(See Table 1)[11]

While this improvement is encouraging, it is not the standard by which South Carolina is currently being compared to other states. For the past several years the U.S. Department of Education has been publishing a "wall chart" which provides a state-by-state comparison of school performance. One column on the chart lists each state's "graduation rate adjusted for

migration and unclassified students." The chart released in February, 1987, shows that in South Carolina 62.4 percent of all students who began the ninth grade graduated from high school four years later. Only three other states in the nation--Louisiana (54.7%), Florida (61.2%), and Mississippi (61.8%)--had a lower graduation rate. The President of the United States has challenged all states to achieve a graduation rate of 90 percent by 1990, but South Carolina is a long way from reaching that goal.[12]

The South Carolina State Department of Education looks at the issue somewhat differently. Rather than comparing the ninth grade enrollment to the number of students who graduate four years later, it compares the number of students enrolled in the ninth grade to the number of students enrolled in the twelfth grade three years later. The emphasis is on the percentage of students who stay in school between the ninth and twelfth grades, not on the percentage who stay in school and graduate. This determines the "holding power" of the state's schools. (See Table 2)

The State Department of Education's data indicate that since the mid-1970s there has been limited progress in keeping more students in school between the ninth and twelfth grades. This is true for both Black and white students. By the time the ninth grade class of 1982-1983 got to the twelfth grade in 1985-1986 one-third (32.8%) of the Black students, and 29.4 percent of the white students were no longer in school.

A total of 16,554 students were lost between the ninth grade in 1982-1983 and the twelfth grade in 1985-1986. The State

Department of Education also reports that between the beginning of the 1982-1983 school year and the end of the 1985-1986 school year a total of 9,463 students dropped out of the public schools. What accounts for the loss of the other 7,091 students, including 3,250 Black students? The State Department of Education assumes these are students whose families moved out of state. Under the Department's procedures students who are no longer attending a school are to be counted as dropouts unless their records are requested by another school. Therefore, the Department assumes that students not included in the dropout reports are those who have moved. (See Table 3)

On the other hand, it is the Department that uses the term "survival" in reporting the percentage of students in the twelfth grade as compared to those in the ninth grade three years earlier. And a recent Department analysis of the public schools' holding power found that "South Carolina schools again showed no overall improvement in their ability to keep their students until high school graduation." This suggests a concern that the state should be able to keep in school not only those students who are now dropping out, but also students who are now withdrawing for other reasons before graduation. Who these students are and why they are not in school is not known.[13]

Tracking the extent of the dropout problem in South Carolina, and the state's success in attacking it, is very difficult because during the past twenty years the state's definition of a dropout has kept changing. In 1966 a dropout was someone who entered the first grade but did not graduate from the twelfth grade. In 1970 a dropout was someone who was enrolled in

school at the beginning of the 1969 school year but was not enrolled at the beginning of the 1970 school year. In 1971 a dropout was a student who was enrolled at the end of one school year but was not enrolled at the end of the next school year. The definition changed again in 1971 and a dropout was considered to be "a pupil who leaves school for any reason, except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school."

The Department's Dropout Prevention Task Force is expected to recommend that the definition for a dropout should now be: "A pupil who voluntarily leaves school for any reason except death before meeting criteria for graduation, enrollment in or completion of a state approved program of studies and without transferring to another school or institution." One of the effects of this proposed change in definition would be to exclude from the dropout count students who are expelled from school. If this new definition is adopted it is likely that the reported dropout rate will improve dramatically. This is because under the current definition the majority of dropouts reported by some school districts consist of students who have been expelled. In 1985-1986 a total of 1,926 students were expelled from grades six through twelve, and Black students accounted for 53 percent (1,023) of this number.[14]

In recent years dropout data has been reported in terms of the number and percentage of students who leave school before the end of a school year. Dropout totals are provided for grades 1-8, which account for 12 percent of all dropouts, but for each of

grades nine through twelve dropout data are reported by grade level. (See Table 4)

It is clear there are serious definitional and data collection problems concerning dropouts in South Carolina. What does the state consider most important: Dropouts compared to total enrollment? Holding power determined by the enrollment of ninth grade students compared to the enrollment of twelfth grade students three years later? Or the graduation rate of students who entered the ninth grade?

In addition, the state only knows the sex, race, and grade levels of dropouts; no other demographic information is available. Though in 1973 the State Department of Education published a detailed demographic profile of students who dropped out during the 1971-1972 school year, no similar report has been published since that time. It is still true, as was pointed out in a 1971 State Department of Education report, that "accurate data are not available...as to characteristics of dropouts." In spite of the current concern about teenage pregnancies, for example, there is no reliable information as to how many dropouts are either pregnant or parents when they withdraw from school. There is also no information about how many dropouts may be under the supervision of the Department of Youth Services when they leave school, or whether they have been identified as having a drug or alcohol problem. And for students who are not reported as dropouts but who leave the school system before graduation, no information is collected or otherwise known. Until these problems are addressed, South Carolina will have to depend on very imperfect information to determine the extent and causes

of dropouts.[15]

What does all this mean for the Black community? First, it is important to acknowledge the progress that has been made. When we compare the percentage of Black students who stay in school until the twelfth grade to similar data from thirty years ago, it is apparent that more Black families want their children in school and the State is more concerned about keeping them in school. We also need to recognize that the disparity between the dropout rates for Black and white students in grades 1-12 has been eliminated. And finally, we can appreciate that the quality and variety of educational opportunities now available to Black students in public schools is a quantum improvement over what was provided to previous generations of Black youth.

But the progress that has been made must not overshadow the unfinished task that remains. The extent of South Carolina's annual dropout rate may seem small when it is described as constituting only 1.6 percent of all students enrolled in the public schools. However, when we consider that at least 17 percent of the Class of 1986 dropped out of school between the ninth and twelfth grades, and that we do not really know what happened to another 13 percent, the problem becomes more compelling. And if we think in terms of the cumulative effect of the dropout process during the past seven years, and calculate that during that time a total of 34,000 youth have dropped out of the state's schools, the real dimensions of the problem become even more apparent. While the numbers of dropouts do not appear to be large for one grade level in one district, when combined

with all other dropouts at all other grade levels in all other districts, and taken over time, these dropout statistics reveal a slow hemorrhaging of human resources which this state cannot afford.

The State Department of Education is now providing a way for high schools to monitor their dropout rates over time, and to compare their performance to other schools throughout the state. The Department's School Performance Report enables each high school to assess its dropout rate within the context of its own past performance and the Report ranks the school's performance against similar schools, and against all schools in the state. A school district's dropout rate is also one factor the Department uses to determine whether a district is "seriously impaired." A school district's performance is examined in relation to dropout standards set by the Department for both grades 7-8 and for grades nine through twelve. In the district found to be impaired this year, Charleston, the dropout rate was a critical factor responsible for the Department's finding. In that instance the district's dropout rate for grades 7-8 was found to be far beyond the state average. Prior to the Education Improvement Act (EIA) this type of problem might have escaped the attention of the state, but now the problem is being addressed because the State Department of Education has a sophisticated accountability system in place, and because the law requires impaired districts to act to remedy their problems.[16]

Because at specific grade levels, in specific schools, in specific school districts the numbers of dropouts are relatively small it is possible to focus greater attention than we now give

to Black youth who are likely to drop out of school. During the 1985-1986 school year the numbers of reported dropouts among Black youth in South Carolina were relatively small, about 1200 dropouts in the ninth grade, 1000 in the tenth grade, 700 in the eleventh grade, and 500 in the twelfth grade. The numbers were very small in individual school districts: 17 dropouts among ninth grade Black youth in Cherokee County, 36 in Greenville County, 16 in Spartanburg County School District #7, 69 in Richland County School District #1, and 199 in all of Charleston County. The numbers were much smaller in most other districts. Considering that these numbers are for the state as a whole, it should be possible for educators, working together with parents and community groups, to prevent these youth from dropping out of school. (See Tables 5 and 6)[17]

Most dropout prevention initiatives take one of two forms. They may be broad publicity efforts designed to communicate to young people and their parents the importance of school attendance. Whether these efforts come in the form of admonitions from the pulpit, programs by civic clubs, or public service announcements by the media, they are intended to create a climate of expectations that shapes public opinion and private action.

The other most frequently used strategy is to provide a program targeted to specific groups of youth who may eventually drop out of school without such a program. Students drop out of school for many reasons and consequently there are many different types of programs designed to address one or more of the problems

that can cause a young person to leave school before graduating. While these programs are not specifically designed for the purpose of dropout prevention, they can ameliorate factors that often cause students to drop out of school. In the public schools the compensatory and remedial programs are one example of this type of intervention. In the community the Boys Clubs, or any number of other community-based youth programs, are examples of this approach. The School Intervention Program of the South Carolina Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program funded under the Jobs Training Partnership Act can also be included in this category.

Both the broad publicity initiatives and the programmatic initiatives are essential and must be continued. But when the numbers of reported dropouts become relatively small, as is now the case among Black youth in South Carolina, then it is possible and necessary to identify and focus intensive intervention strategies on specific youth who are highly at risk of dropping out of school. Generally speaking, this is not being done in South Carolina. Even though a school counselor may choose to give special attention to a particular student, or a community youth worker may do so, there is no system, nor a process, for routinely assessing the circumstances of high risk students to determine if they are potential dropouts. Because there is no such system many students do not get the attention or services they need, and they eventually drop out of school. There is tremendous potential for schools and community groups to work together to develop and implement a system that will identify and respond to individual students who may drop out of school. Some

students will not be saved, but at least they will be more than dropout statistics. The school and community will at least know who these youth are and will have some insight into the circumstances that caused them to drop out of school. This perspective can, in turn, inform future efforts to prevent dropouts. (See Appendix)

Any discussion of school dropouts in South Carolina would be incomplete without mentioning the potential for the number of Black dropouts to increase in the future. This discussion is, of course, speculative, and one can only hope that the decline in the number of dropouts continues. Nevertheless, there is considerable concern that students' responses to a combination of new requirements arising from the EIA may result in more dropouts.

One of the major purposes of the EIA is to strengthen the academic standards of the public schools, and to assure that recipients of the state high school diploma have, in fact, mastered certain basic skills. This means that beginning with the graduating class of 1990, which will be composed of the students now in the ninth grade, students will have to meet three criteria to receive a state high school diploma. They must have: (1) attended grades 1-12, (2) earned at least 20 units of course work in high school; and (3) passed the high school exit exam.

No one knows whether, or to what extent, a student's failure to meet one or more of these requirements will cause him or her to leave school before graduating. However, there is reason for concern. The exit exam includes separate tests,

administered on separate days, for reading, mathematics and writing. A student must pass all three sections of the exam in order to receive a regular state high school diploma. Last spring the exit exam was given on a trial basis to students in the tenth grade. These students will not be affected by the new requirement which does not become binding until the exam is taken by tenth grade students in the spring of 1988. However, results from last year's test indicated that 47 percent (7,983) of the Black students did not meet the state standard on the reading portion of the exit exam. However, 15 percent (4,064) of the white students did not meet the reading standard. Fifty-three percent (8,879) of the Black students, and 19 percent (5,132) of the white students did not meet the math standard. Forty-four percent (7,375) of the Black students, and 12 percent of the white students did not meet the writing standard. (See Table 6)[18]

It should be emphasized that when a student fails any portion of the exit exam state law requires the student to receive remediation in that subject. The law also provides that a student will have three additional chances to retake the portion of the exam that he/she failed. In spite of these requirements no one knows what will happen when a student fails one or more sections the exit exam not once but two or three times. Many people believe that unless extraordinary efforts are made by school officials to revise their curricula to provide courses of study that are of interest and value for those who do not pass the exam, these students will drop out of school. Other people believe academically marginal students who do not pass the exam will stay in school as long as necessary (state law provides they

can remain in school until they are twenty-one years old) to pass the exam and receive a high school diploma. Students who do not pass one or more sections of the exam may also stay in school through the twelfth grade but choose to receive an attendance certificate rather than a diploma.

State education officials point out that people should be cautious about projecting apocalyptic scenarios based on the 1986 test results. They observe that students may not have been highly motivated to take the exit exam seriously because they knew its outcome would not be binding on them. Conversely, when tenth graders take the test in 1988 they may be more motivated because they will know their test performance will determine whether they will receive a regular high school diploma. State officials also point out that tenth graders in 1988 will also be better prepared because many of them will have received EIA mandated remediation. However, when these students--currently in the ninth grade--took their regular Basic Skills Assessment Program tests last year in the eighth grade, the results were not encouraging. Forty-four percent (8,143) of the Black students did not meet the reading standard, 59% (10,956) did not meet the math standard, and 39% (7,139) did not meet the writing standard. These data seem to indicate a degree of under achievement that many people would consider even more worrisome than the dropout rate. Clearly, many of these students will have to make dramatic progress if they are going to pass the exit exam in 1988. (See Table 5)[19]

We can only hope that students' failures on the exit exam will not result in increased dropouts among Black youth.

Nevertheless, it would be irresponsible to ignore this possibility. This poses a tremendous challenge for the Black community. There is a great need for parents and community organizations to let Black youth know the importance of being well prepared, and and to make sure they understand the consequences of failure. It is essential for parents and community groups to take the initiative to determine that schools are now providing the most marginal students with the academic preparation they need to get ready for the exam. And it is imperative for these same groups to ask local school officials specific questions, and to expect specific answers about what will be done when students fail the exam once, twice, or three times. What actions will be taken to keep these students in school? How will the curricula be altered to meet the unique needs of these students? How will they become prepared to enter the labor force, and to be become self-sufficient?

As we have seen, during the past several decades the State of South Carolina has gradually placed more emphasis on school attendance. As a result, for the past two years the state's public schools have led the nation in student average daily attendance (95.8%).[20] The state's increased attention to school attendance has also resulted in a slow but steady decline in the number and proportion of Black youth dropping out of school. But much work needs to be done. The state needs to come to grips with basic definitional and data collection issues, and to give attention to the problem of the graduation rate of ninth graders. Schools and communities also need to take affirmative steps to reduce the numbers of dropouts even further by identifying

specific students who may be potential dropouts, and by bringing a variety of intervention strategies to bear on these youth. Finally, schools and communities must be sensitive to new circumstances, such as the exit exam, that may have an impact on the dropout rate.

The current dropout rate among Black youth, no matter how small it may be in the context of South Carolina's history, is unacceptable. Neither Black communities, nor the State of South Carolina can tolerate several thousand Black youth dropping out of school each year unprepared for the future. The chances are too great that these young people will be the ones least able to provide for themselves and their families. It is possible to prevent dropouts, and to keep the dropout rate from increasing, but this will require continuing vigilence and action.

Table 1

Black and White Dropouts in South Carolina Public Schools as Percent of Black and White Total Enrollments, Grades 1-12

School Year	#Black Dropouts	Black Dropouts as % of Total Black Enrollment	#White Dropouts	White Dropouts as % of Total White Enrollment
1979-1980	5,749	2.3	7,951	2.3
1980-1981	5,605	2.3	7,760	2.2
1981-1982	5,198	2.1	6,878	2.0
1982-1983	4,625	1.9	5,925	1.8
1983-1984	4,764	2.0	6,020	1.8
1984-1985	4,185	1.7	5,474	1.6
1985-1986	3,824	1.6	5,346	1.6

Black and White Dropouts in South Carolina Public Schools As Percent of Total Number of Dropouts, Grades 1-12

School Year	Black	White	Total Black Student Enrollment as % of Total Enrollment, Grades 1-12
1979-1980	42%	58%	42%
1980-1981	42%	58%	42%
1981-1982	43%	57%	42%
1982-1983	44%	56%	42%
1983-1984	44%	56%	42%
1984-1985	43%	57%	42%
1985-1986	42%	58%	42%

Source: South Carolina State Department of Education, "Dropout Report" (September: 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986).

Table 2

Attrition of Student Enrollment Between Grades 9 and 12 in South Carolina Public Schools

Grade 9	Grade 12	Number of Black Students Withdrawing From School Between 9th and 12th Grades	Black Rate of Attrition	Number of White Students Withdrawing From School Between 9th and 12th Grades	White Rate of Attrition
1956-1957	1959-1960	6,776	45.3%	7,119	31.3%
1961-1962	1964-1965	6,909	36.4%	7,821	25.6%
1966-1967	1969-1970	7,626	36.5%	8,342	26.8%
1971-1972	1974-1975	8,165	35.5%	10,299	31.1%
1974-1975	1977-1978	7,020	30.8%	9,892	29.4%
1975-1976	1978-1979	7,422	31.4%	10,222	30.0%
1976-1977	1979-1980	6,969	29.7%	10,650	30.5%
1977-1978	1980-1981	7,226	30.3%	10,617	30.3%
1978-1979	1981-1982	7,883	31.3%	10,020	28.6%
1979-1980	1982-1983	7,832	31.5%	9,442	28.9%
1980-1981	1983-1984	7,545	30.8%	9,330	29.3%
1981-1982	1984-1985	7,618	32.4%	9,180	29.4%
1982-1983	1985-1986	7,355	32.8%	9,199	29.4%

Source: South Carolina State Department of Education, "Student Holding Power Comparisons, Grades 9-12, Utilizing End-of-the-Year Enrollment" (one page, undated, 1986?).

Table 3

The Attrition Between 1982 and 1986 of South Carolina Public School Students Entering the Ninth Grade in 1982

	Black		White		Total	
	Enrollment	Dropouts	Enrollment	Dropouts	Enrollment	Dropouts
Grade 9 1982-1983	22,344	1,494	31,023	1,695	53,367	3,189
Grade 10 1983-1984	19,773	1,283	28,104	1,657	47,877	2,940
Grade 11 1984-1985	16,792	872	24,550	1,266	41,342	2,138
Grade 12 1985-1986	14,985	460	22,044	736	37,029	1,196
Total number of Class of 1986 students withdrawing from school between 1982 and 1986:	22,344 -14,985 7,359		31,023 -22,044 8,979		53,367 -37,029 16,338	
Total number of Class of 1986 dropouts between 1982 and 1986:		4,109		5,354		9,463
Total number of Class of 1986 students whose withdrawal from school between 1982 and 1986 is not accounted for by published dropout data:	7,359 -4,109 3,250		8,979 -5,354 3,625		16,338* - 9,463 6,875	

*Note: This figure is calculated from the State Department of Education's annual dropout report. However, a Department report on holding power shows a loss of 16,554 students. If this latter figure is used the number of students whose loss is not explained by dropout data would be 7,019.

Sources: South Carolina State Department of Education, "Dropout Report" (September: 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986; "Student Holding Power Comparisons, Grades 9-12, Utilizing End-of-the-Year Enrollment" (one page, undated, 1986?).

Table 4
South Carolina Public School Dropouts, Grades 1-8

School Year	Black Number	Black Dropouts as Percent of 1-8 Black Enrollment	White Number	White Dropouts as Percent of 1-8 White Enrollment	1-8 Black / White Dropouts as Percent of 1-12 Black / White Dropouts: Black	1-8 Black / White Dropouts as Percent of 1-12 Black / White Dropouts: White
1979-1980	823	.5%	1028	.4%	14%	13%
1980-1981	767	.5%	947	.4%	14%	12%
1981-1982	633	.4%	844	.4%	12%	12%
1982-1983	543	.3%	693	.3%	12%	12%
1983-1984	476	.3%	649	.3%	10%	11%
1984-1985	449	.3%	605	.3%	11%	11%
1985-1986	520	.3%	602	.3%	14%	11%

Source: South Carolina State Department of Education, "Dropout Report" (September: 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986).

Table 5

Number of South Carolina Public School Dropouts, Grades 9-12

School Year	Ninth Grade Black	Ninth Grade White	Tenth Grade Black	Tenth Grade White	Eleventh Grade Black	Eleventh Grade White	Twelfth Grade Black	Twelfth Grade White
1979-1980	1,686	2,182	1,478	2,123	1,152	1,633	610	984
1980-1981	1,701	2,155	1,483	2,083	1,097	1,650	557	925
1981-1982	1,632	1,845	1,369	1,754	1,036	1,507	528	928
1982-1983	1,494	1,695	1,216	1,640	897	1,186	475	711
1983-1984	1,499	1,656	1,283	1,657	933	1,217	573	841
1984-1985	1,290	1,482	1,068	1,330	872	1,266	506	791
1985-1986	1,186	1,446	971	1,453	687	1,109	460	736

*Percent of South Carolina Public School Dropouts, Grades 9-12

School Year	Ninth Grade Black	Ninth Grade White	Tenth Grade Black	Tenth Grade White	Eleventh Grade Black	Eleventh Grade White	Twelfth Grade Black	Twelfth Grade White
1979-1980	6.8%	6.7%	6.6%	6.8%	6.3%	6.1%	3.7%	4.1%
1980-1981	7.0%	6.8%	6.8%	7.1%	5.8%	6.1%	3.4%	3.8%
1981-1982	7.0%	6.0%	6.3%	6.2%	5.6%	6.0%	3.1%	3.7%
1982-1983	6.7%	5.5%	5.9%	5.9%	4.8%	4.8%	2.8%	3.0%
1983-1984	6.8%	5.3%	6.5%	5.9%	5.3%	5.0%	3.4%	3.7%
1984-1985	5.7%	4.4%	5.7%	4.8%	5.2%	5.2%	3.2%	3.6%
1985-1986	5.1%	4.2%	5.0%	4.9%	4.5%	4.7%	3.1%	3.3%

*Note: In 1985-1986 the average dropout rate for all students in grades 9-12 was 4.36 percent. Twenty-nine of the state's 92 school districts had average 9-12 dropout rates ranging from 5 to 6.9 percent. Three other districts had average dropout rates from 7 to 8.9 percent.

Sources: South Carolina State Department of Education, "Dropout Report" (September: 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986); Quality Assessment Section of the SC SDE, "Frequency of School Districts by Dropout Rate, Grades 9-12" (one page, undated, 1986?).

Table 6

South Carolina School Districts With More than Ten Black Students Dropping Out of Grades 9, 10, 11, or 12, Respectively, 1985-1986

Grade 9	Number	Percent*
Charleston	199	9.0%
Florence #1	76	10.2%
Richland #1	69	3.1%
Aiken	56	8.0%
Horry	40	6.5%
Chesterfield	37	10.3%
Georgetown	36	6.7%
Newberry	35	10.9%
Darlington	34	5.3%
Greenville	34	2.7%
Williamsburg	29	4.3%
Anderson #5	24	8.5%
Orangeburg #5	22	4.1%
Berkeley	21	3.0%
Lancaster	21	8.6%
Cherokee	17	8.4%
York #3	17	4.6%
Spartanburg #7	16	4.3%
Florence #3	15	7.0%
Marlboro	15	3.9%
Abbeville	14	6.9%
Colleton	14	3.4%
Richland #2	14	3.2%
Clarendon #2	13	6.3%
Marion #2	13	6.0%
Sumter #2	13	2.6%
Union	13	7.0%
Allendale	12	7.4%
McCormick	12	8.6%
State Average		5.1%

Grade 10	Number	Percent*
Charleston	88	5.5%
Richland #1	64	3.9%
Fairfield	38	13.6%
Aiken	37	6.2%
Spartanburg #7	35	9.3%
Sumter #17	34	6.8%
York #3	31	9.1%
Cherokee	27	13.2%
Darlington	26	5.2%
Florence #3	26	11.0%
Greenville	26	2.5%
Lancaster	25	10.0%
Greenwood #50	24	8.3%
Newberry	22	9.8%
Orangeburg #4	22	5.6%
Beaufort	20	5.0%
Florence #1	20	4.3%
Georgetown	20	4.7%
Anderson #5	19	6.5%
Sumter #2	19	4.7%
Williamsburg	19	3.9%
Chesterfield	17	6.8%
Horry	16	3.3%
Dillon #2	15	7.1%
Richland #2	15	4.2%
Allendale	13	9.6%
Edgefield	12	6.6%
Union	12	6.5%
State Average		5.0%

Grade 11	Number	Percent*
Charleston	78	6.6%
Richland #1	63	4.8%
Greenville	30	3.4%
Aiken	24	4.9%
Georgetown	24	6.6%
Beaufort	18	5.3%
Florence #1	17	6.2%
Spartanburg #7	17	5.7%
Anderson #5	16	7.2%
Fairfield	15	8.3%
Horry	15	3.9%
Lancaster	15	7.3%
York #3	15	5.5%
Kershaw	14	6.2%
Richland #2	14	4.7%
Dorchester #2	13	7.3%
Edgefield	13	8.8%
Orangeburg #5	12	3.4%
Cherokee	11	8.0%
Chesterfield	11	7.1%
Colleton	11	5.1%
Newberry	11	7.6%
Oconee	11	11.6%
Orangeburg #3	11	6.6%
State Average		4.5%

Grade 12	Number	Percent*
Charleston	60	5.2%
Spartanburg #7	27	10.1%
Richland #1	26	2.1%
Aiken	25	5.0%
Chester	17	7.1%
York #3	16	5.9%
Fairfield	12	6.7%
Kershaw	12	5.6%
Anderson #5	11	4.8%
Lee	11	5.9%
State Average		3.1%

*Indicates proportion of Black dropouts in relation to Black enrollment in this grade.

Source: SC SDE, "Dropout Report" (September 1986)

Table 7

Class of 1988

Number / Percent of South Carolina 1985-1986 Tenth Grade Students Not Meeting State Standard on One or More Areas of the Basic Skills Assessment Program Exit Exam

Area Tested	Total # Black Students Taking Test	Black Students Not Meeting Standard Number	Percent	Total # White Students Taking Test	White Students Not Meeting Standard Number	Percent
Reading	16,878	7,983	47.3%	26,916	4,064	15.1%
Math	16,849	8,879	52.7%	26,872	5,132	19.1%
Writing	16,837	7,375	43.8%	26,876	3,118	11.6%

Class of 1990

Number / Percent of South Carolina 1985-1986 Eighth Grade Students Not Meeting State Standard on One or More Areas of the Basic Skills Assessment Program Tests

Area Tested	Total # Black Students Taking Test	Black Students Not Meeting Standard Number	Percent	Total # White Students Taking Test	White Students Not Meeting Standard Number	Percent
Reading	18,465	8,143	44.1%	28,145	5,403	19.2%
Math	18,446	10,956	59.4%	28,110	8,236	29.3%
Writing	18,446	7,139	38.7%	28,122	3,628	12.9%

Sources: Office of Research of the South Carolina State Department of Education, "Exit Examination 1986 Results: Prepared for Use in Exit Examination Orientation Sessions" (March 1987); "South Carolina Basic Skills Assessment Program Demographic Report - Grade 8."

Footnotes

[1]National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, A Blueprint for Success (1986), p. 3; Teachers College at Columbia University, Teachers College Record (Spring 1986); North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, A Plan for Dropout Prevention in North Carolina: Cooperation and Comprehensiveness (March 1985), Keeping Students in School: Dropout Data, Research, and Programs (July 1985), State Dropout Prevention Funds: Annual Report (April 1986); Florida Department of Education, Dropout Prevention: A Manual for Developing Comprehensive Plans (September 1986); "Clemson to Play Role in National Dropout Campaign," The Greenville (SC) News, 29 October 1986, p. 1-C.

[2]South Carolina State Department of Education [SC SDE], Dropout Prevention Task Force Report [unpublished draft], (28 January 1987).

[3]Business Advisory Commission of the Education Commission of the States, Reconnecting Youth: The Next Stage of Reform (October 1985), p. 5.

[4]Judith Rebecca Joyner, "An Analysis of State Educational Policies and Practices in South Carolina Relating to School-Age Youth Not Enrolled in School" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1960), pp. 24, 27, 167; Division of Surveys and Field Services of George Peabody College for Teachers, Public Schools of South Carolina: A Report of the South Carolina Eduction Survey Committee (Nashville, Tennessee: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1948), pp. 230, 235; Office of Research of the SC SDE, "Selected Data on Dropouts in South Carolina Schools" (October 1968), p.4.

[5]Division of Research, Experimentation, and Surveys of the SC SDE, "Dropouts in South Carolina Schools" (April 1966), p. 4; Acts and Joint Resolutions of the State of South Carolina, Regular Session of 1967 55, pp. 181-183.

[6]Moodys Investors Services, Inc. and Campus Facilities Associates, Opportunity and Growth in South Carolina, 1968-1985 (1968), p. 72.

[7]Office of Planning of the SC SDE, "A Five Year Plan to Reduce the Number of Dropouts in the South Carolina Public Schools" (undated, 1971?).

[8]SC SDE, "Characteristics of Dropouts from South Carolina Public Schools During the 1971-1972 Academic Year" (March 1973), p. 6.

[9]Office of Planning of the SC SDE, "South Carolina Assessment of Educational Needs" (1976), pp. 247-249.

Footnotes (continued)

[10]Terry K. Peterson and Gregg M. Strasler, "The Impact of Recent Educational Reforms on Minority and All Low Achieving Students and on Minority and All High Achieving Students: Positive Early Indications from South Carolina" (Columbia, SC: Office of the Governor, April 1986), pp. 2-9.

[11]The State Department of Education's annual dropoout report provides information on "white" and "non-white" dropouts. Throughout this paper the term "Black" is used instead of "non-white" because in South Carolina the overwhelming percentage of "non-white" students are, in fact, Black. However, readers should be aware that this paper's data for Black students, when based on the SDE's annual dropout report, may include "non-white" racial minorities other than Black students. SC SDE, "Dropout Report" (September: 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986).

[12]William Montague, "Bennett's 'Wall Chart' Shows Student Gains Have Reached Plateau," Education Week (Washington, D.C.: Editorial Projects in Education, Inc., 18 February 1987), pp. 20-21.

[13]SC SDE, "Student Holding Power Comparisons, Grades 9-12, Utilizing End-of-the-Year Enrollment" (one page, undated, 1986?); Division of Public Accountability of the SC SDE, What Is The Penny Buying For South Carolina?: An Assessment of the Second Year of the South Carolina Education Improvement Act (1 December 1986), pp. 24-25; SC SDE, "Dropout Report" (September: 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986).

[14]Office of Planning of the SC SDE, "A Five Year Plan to Reduce the Number of Dropouts in the South Carolina Public Schools" (undated, 1971?); Office of Planning of the SC SDE, "South Carolina Assessment of Educational Needs" (1976), p. 247; SC SDE, Dropout Prevention Task Force Report [unpublished draft], (28 January 1987), p. 7. Data concerning unlawful absences (truancy, suspension, expulsion) are collected only because of a mandate to the SDE as provided for in a proviso in the State Appropriations Act. SC SDE, "Unlawful Absence Report Data, 180-Day Report Data, 1985-1986" (September 1986).

[15]SC SDE, "Characteristics of Dropouts from South Carolina Public Schools During the 1971-1972 Academic Year" (March 1973); Office of Planning of the SC SDE, "A Five Year Plan to Reduce the Number of Dropouts in the South Carolina Public Schools" (undated, 1971?), p. 2.

Footnotes (continued)

[16]Michael M. Turner, "The South Carolina School Performance Report System: Accountability for School Performance Outcomes" The Palmetto Administrator, January 1987, p. 9. Other EIA mandates which could indirectly affect a student's decision to drop out of school concern grade-to-grade promotion requirements, academic standards for eligibility to participate in inter-scholastic activities, and denial of course credit for accumulation of unlawful absences. School Council Assistance Project of the University of South Carolina, The Education Improvement Act of 1984 (February 1985), pp. 39-40; Turner, Chief Supervisor of the Quality Assessment Section of the SC SDE, telephone conversation on 23 March 1987.

[17]SC SDE, "Dropout Report" (September, 1986).

[18]Office of Research of the SC SDE, "Exit Examination 1986 Results: Prepared for Use in Exit Examination Orientation Sessions" (March 1987).

[19]Ibid.

[20]Division of Public Accountability of the SC SDE, What is the Penny Buying for South Carolina (1 December 1986), p. 25.

Appendix

To: Persons Interested in Dropout Prevention

From: M. Hayes Mizell

I have developed the enclosed form to enable teachers, counselors, administrators, and youth workers to assemble objective data that may indicate a student is at risk of dropping out of school. The form is an effort to move beyond general discussions about the need for early identification and intervention, and to provide a specific means for identifying individual students who may be potential dropouts.

This instrument has not been field tested nor validated. The causes of dropouts are varied and complex and it is unlikely it will ever be possible to develop an instrument that will be one hundred percent effective in predicting whether a student will drop out of school. However, I encourage researchers and academicians to improve on this instrument.

Reports of research and the experiences of educators and youth workers have established some consensus about factors which seem to have a positive correlation to students' decisions to withdraw from school before graduating. The enclosed form incorporates these factors.

The form provides a mechanism, and suggests a process, for identifying students who are affected by circumstances that may cause them to decide to drop out of school. The suggested process is intended to supplement, rather than to supplant, dropout prevention initiatives designed to effect system change, or targeted to certain groups of students.

The form can be used for students at both the middle and high school levels. While most dropouts occur during the ninth and tenth grades, many educators and youth workers believe it is important to identify potential dropouts during grades 6-8. For that reason, the use of this form at early grade levels is recommended.

The form is designed to be used in the Spring of 1987 to identify students who should receive special attention to make sure they return to school in 1987-1988. These students should also be the target of dropout prevention strategies throughout the 1987-1988 school year and, if necessary, beyond. Each year the form should be revised--based on the experience gained by its use the previous year--and used in the months February through May.

While the form is designed for use in South Carolina it can be easily adapted to fit local circumstances anywhere in the nation. It can also be adapted to reflect your own philosophy or experience. Practitioners are encouraged to improve the form and evaluate the effects of its use. The important thing is for schools and youth workers to have and use some insrument which will systematically focus attention and prevention strategies on individual students.

A Guide for the Identification of a Student

Meriting Special Dropout Prevention Initiatives

[To be completed during Spring, 1987]

(This form is a guide for any teacher, counselor, administrator, or youth worker to use in identifying a student who may be at risk of dropping out of school. This is not intended to be a scientific instrument or an absolute predictor of whether a student will drop out of school. Rather, it is to be used to document that a student is experiencing a combination of problems that merit the special attention of administrators, teachers, counselors, and community agencies. When a student meets three or more of the criteria numbered 1 - 21 below this indicates the student may be at risk of dropping out of school. The more criteria the student meets the the greater the risk the student may drop out. When a student is so identified, this should, at a minimum, trigger: (1) a meeting of all adults who routinely work with the student; and (2) their careful assessment of whether the student is, in fact, at risk of dropping out of school. If it is determined the student is at risk of dropping out school, priority should be given to (3) taking action to assure that the student returns to school in 1987-1988; and (4) the development and follow-up of a variety of coordinated dropout prevention strategies that will be put into effect by no later than the beginning of the 1987-1988 school year. If the student's problems are left unattended they may eventually lead to a decision by the student to leave school before graduating. It is recommended that this form be completed for any student demonstrating strong evidence of alientation, isolation, and poor performance.)

Name of student: _____

Date of birth: _____

Current age: _____years _____months

School: _____

Grade in school: _____

Person completing this form: _____

Position: _____

Date this form was completed: _____

PRIORITY ATTENTION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO A STUDENT MEETING AT LEAST THREE OF THE CRITERIA NUMBERED 1 - 21 BELOW. CHECK ALL OF THE FOLLOWING THAT ARE KNOWN TO BE CORRECT FOR THIS STUDENT:

1. The student is currently:
   ____ 13.5 years old or older but rising to or in the 6th grade, or less;
   ____ 14.5 years old or older but rising to or in the 7th grade;
   ____ 15.5 years old or older but rising to or in the 8th grade;
   ____ 16.5 years old or older but rising to or in the 9th grade;
   ____ 17.5 years old or older but rising to or in the 10th grade;
   ____ 18.5 years old or older but rising to or in the 11th grade;
   ____ 19.5 years old or older but rising to or in the 12th grade.

2. ____ In bottom quartile on ___BSAP or ___CTBS reading tests in 1986.

3. ____ Did not pass the reading portion of the BSAP 10th grade "exit exam" in the Spring of 1986.

4. ____ Was not promoted to the next grade at the end of a previous school year. Grade? _____ Year?_____

5. ____ Failed at least two of the following subjects for the year in 1985-1986: ___English, ___math, ___social studies, ___science.

6. ____ Failed at least two of the following subjects during one or more grading periods in 1986-1987: ___English, ___math, ___social studies, ___science.

7. ____ Was ___tardy for first period class five or more times, or ___cut at least one class five or more times in 1986-1987.

8. ____ Determined by school officials to be a truant in 1986-1987.

9. ____ Will not receive credit for at least one course in 1986-1987 because of excessive absences from school. Course(s)?_____

10. ____ Suspended from school for five or more days in 1986-1987.

11. ____ Expelled from school in any previous school year.

12. ____ Has been referred to Family Court and/or the Department of Youth Services during the previous twelve months.

13. ____ Rising to or in grade 10, 11, or 12 and has a handicapping condition but is not scheduled to receive employability development services from any agency.
    Type of handicap? _____

14. ____ Rising to or in grade 10, 11, or 12 but is not enrolled in any vocational education sequence, nor in a sequence of pre-college courses, nor in a ROTC program.

15. ____ Rising to or in grade 10, 11, or 12 but based on units earned to date, and/or BSAP performance, it is projected that the student will not graduate with the class in which he/she is currently enrolled.

16. ____ Is not an active member of at least one school sponsored extracurricular organization.

17. ____ Is not participating in at least one school sponsored extracurricular activity solely because the student did not meet grade requirements established by school board policy.

18. ____ Has previously been classified as a dropout. Year?_____

19. ____ Has violated school board policy or has been arrested for possession, use, or distribution of controlled substances.

20. ____ Is pregnant. Married?_____

21. ____ Is the parent of one or more children. Number? _____

22. ____ Resides in household receiving AFDC payments.

23. ____ Lives with either: one biological parent, a guardian, or in a foster home or group home.

25. ____ At least one parent/guardian with whom the student resides did not graduate from high school.

26. ____ Has one or more siblings who did not graduate from high school.